



**READING 7** Identify the literary language and devices used in personal narratives.

# The Jacket

Personal Narrative by Gary Soto

## What builds CONFIDENCE?

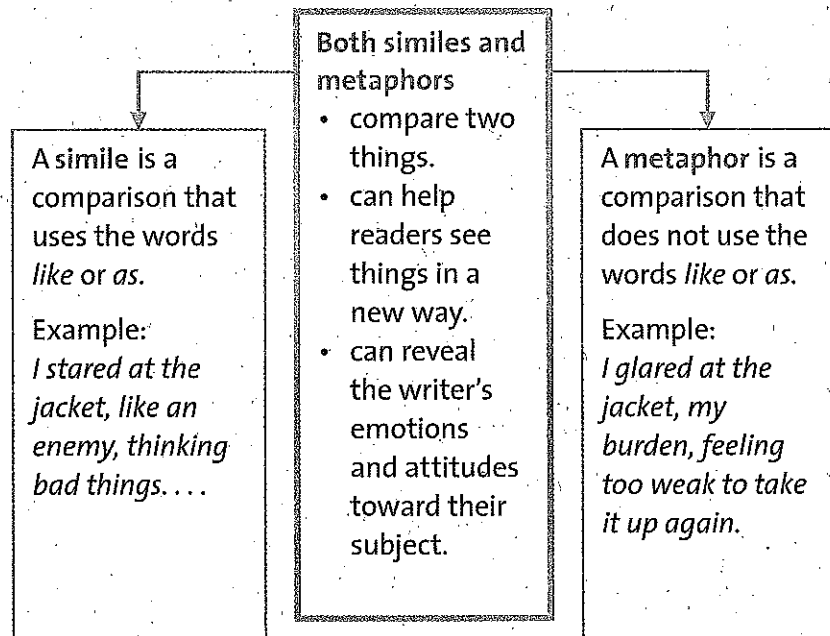
If you have confidence, that means you believe in yourself and in what you can accomplish. Confidence can help you speak in front of a group, meet new people, or make difficult choices. Real confidence comes from within. Still, as Gary Soto expresses in "The Jacket," outside pressures can sometimes bring you down.

**LIST IT** Brainstorm with classmates to list kinds of experiences that can build confidence. Then identify some ways that a person's confidence can be damaged.

Confidence Builders	Confidence Busters
doing well on a test	

## Literary Analysis: Similes and Metaphors

Personal narratives allow writers to share their experiences with readers. As in fiction, nonfiction writers use descriptive language and literary devices such as similes and metaphors. The graphic below explains how similes and metaphors are alike and different.



As you read "The Jacket" look for similes and metaphors and notice what they help you understand.

## Reading Strategy: Summarize

One way to check your understanding of a work is to summarize it. A good **summary** provides a brief retelling of the main ideas. It uses your own words, but does not include your opinions, or personal views, about the subject. As you read "The Jacket," notes in the side column will ask you to record key events of the story in a log like the one below. Make sure you maintain the same meaning and a logical order in your notes.



**READING 10A** Summarize the main ideas and supporting details in text, demonstrating an understanding that a summary does not include opinions.  
**RC-6(F)** Summarize texts in ways that maintain meaning and logical order within a text.

### Key Event

- *Soto asks his mother for a black leather jacket.*
- *Soto wanted a jacket that would make him look cool and tough, like a biker.*

## Vocabulary in Context

Note: Words are listed in the order in which they appear in the personal narrative.

**profile** (prō'fīl') *n.* a side view of an object, especially of the human head  
*I faced the mirror and then turned in **profile** to see how I looked.*

**propeller** (prə-pěl'ər) *n.* a spinning blade used to move a boat or airplane forward  
**propel** *v.*

*The baby's hat has a tiny **propeller** on top that spins in the wind.*

**shrivel** (shrĭ'vel) *v.* to shrink or wrinkle

*My wool gloves were **shriveled** when they came out of the dryer.*

**vicious** (vīsh'əs) *adj.* severe or fierce

*Kent felt a **vicious** envy when he eyed Tom's new skates.*

## Vocabulary Practice

Review the vocabulary words and think about their meanings. Then, use at least one of the words to tell about an article of clothing you once loved—or hated.

---

---

---

---

**SET A PURPOSE  
FOR READING**

Read "The Jacket" to discover how an article of clothing shaped Gary Soto's perception of himself.

# The Jacket



Personal Narrative by  
**GARY SOTO**

**BACKGROUND** To create lively, poetic images in his writing, Gary Soto often draws upon childhood memories of growing up in a Mexican-American community in Fresno, California. "The Jacket" is a personal narrative about this time in Soto's life.

**M**y clothes have failed me.

I remember the green coat that I wore in fifth and sixth grades when you either danced like a champ or pressed yourself against a greasy wall, bitter as a penny toward the happy couples.

When I needed a new jacket and my mother asked what kind I wanted, I described something like bikers wear: black leather and silver studs<sup>1</sup> with enough belts to hold down a small town. We were in the kitchen, steam on the windows from her cooking. She listened so long while stirring dinner that I thought she understood for sure the

1. **studs:** small ornamental metal buttons mounted on fabric.

kind I wanted. The next day when I got home from school, I discovered draped on my bedpost a jacket the color of day-old guacamole.<sup>2</sup> I threw my books on the bed and approached the jacket slowly, as if it were a stranger whose hand I had to shake. I touched the vinyl sleeve, the collar, and peeked at the mustard-colored lining. Ⓐ

From the kitchen mother yelled that my jacket was in the closet. I closed the door to her voice and pulled at the rack of clothes in the closet, hoping the jacket on the bedpost wasn't for me but my mean brother. No luck. I gave up. From my bed, I stared at the jacket. I wanted to cry because it was so ugly and so big that I knew I'd have to wear it a long time. I was a small kid, thin as a young tree, and it would be years before I'd have a new one. I stared at the jacket, like an enemy, thinking bad things before I took off my old jacket whose sleeves climbed halfway to my elbow. Ⓑ

I put the big jacket on. I zipped it up and down several times, and rolled the cuffs up so they didn't cover my hands. I put my hands in the pockets and flapped the jacket like a bird's wings. I stood in front of the mirror, full face, then profile, and then looked over my shoulder as if someone had called me. I sat on the bed, stood against the bed, and combed my hair to see what I would look like doing something natural. I looked ugly. I threw it on my brother's bed and looked at it for a long time before I slipped it on and went out to the backyard, smiling a "thank you" to my mom as I passed her in the kitchen. With my hands in my pockets I kicked a ball against the fence, and then climbed it to sit looking into the alley. I hurled orange peels at the mouth of an open garbage can and when the peels were gone I watched the white puffs of my breath thin to nothing.

### Ⓐ SUMMARIZE

When you summarize, you note the most important events and ideas. Reread lines 6–14. Complete the log entry about getting the jacket.

Key Events
• _____
_____
_____
_____
• _____
_____
_____
_____

### Ⓑ SIMILES AND METAPHORS

Underline two similes Soto uses in lines 24–26. What do these comparisons tell you about how he feels about the jacket?

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

**profile** (prō'fīl') *n.* a side view of an object, especially of the human head

2. **guacamole** (gwā'kə-mō'lē): a thick paste made from avocados, citrus juice, onions, and seasoning, often served as a dip.

I jumped down, hands in my pockets, and in the backyard on my knees I teased my dog, Brownie, by swooping my arms while making bird calls. He jumped at me and missed. He jumped again and again, until a tooth sunk deep, ripping an L-shaped tear on my left sleeve. I pushed Brownie away to study the tear as I would  
 50 a cut on my arm. There was no blood, only a few loose pieces of fuzz. Dumb dog, I thought, and pushed him away hard when he tried to bite again. I got up from my knees and went to my bedroom to sit with my jacket on my lap, with the lights out.

That was the first afternoon with my new jacket. The next day I wore it to sixth grade and got a D on a math quiz. During the morning recess Frankie T., the playground terrorist, pushed me to the ground and told me  
 60 to stay there until recess was over. My best friend, Steve Negrete, ate an apple while looking at me, and the girls turned away to whisper on the monkey bars.<sup>3</sup> The teachers were no help: they looked my way and talked about how foolish I looked in my new jacket. I saw their heads bob with laughter, their hands half-covering their mouths. ©

Even though it was cold, I took off the jacket during lunch and played kickball in a thin shirt, my arms feeling like braille<sup>4</sup> from goose bumps. But when I returned to class I slipped the jacket on and shivered until I was  
 70 warm. I sat on my hands, heating them up, while my teeth chattered like a cup of crooked dice. Finally warm, I slid out of the jacket but a few minutes later put it back on when the fire bell rang. We paraded out into the yard where we, the sixth graders, walked past all the other grades to stand against the back fence. Everybody saw me. Although they didn't say out loud, "Man, that's ugly,"

### © SUMMARIZE

Reread lines 56–65. How do other people treat the narrator now that he is wearing the jacket? Record key events in the log.

Key Events
• _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
• _____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. **monkey bars:** a structure of poles and bars for climbing, often found in playgrounds.

4. **braille** (brāl): a system of writing or printing for blind people, made up of arrangements of raised dots representing letters and numbers.

I heard the buzz-buzz of gossip and even laughter that I knew was meant for me.

And so I went, in my guacamole-colored jacket. So  
80 embarrassed, so hurt, I couldn't even do my homework. I received Cs on quizzes, and forgot the state capitals and the rivers of South America, our friendly neighbor. Even the girls who had been friendly blew away like loose flowers to follow the boys in neat jackets. ⑩

I wore that thing for three years until the sleeves grew short and my forearms stuck out like the necks of turtles. All during that time no love came to me—no little dark girl in a Sunday dress she wore on Monday. At lunchtime I stayed with the ugly boys who leaned against the  
90 chainlink fence and looked around with propellers of grass spinning in our mouths. We saw girls walk by alone, saw couples, hand in hand, their heads like bookends pressing air together. We saw them and spun our propellers so fast our faces were blurs. ⑪

I blame that jacket for those bad years. I blame my mother for her bad taste and her cheap ways. It was a sad time for the heart. With a friend I spent my sixth-grade year in a tree in the alley, waiting for something good to happen to me in that jacket, which had become the ugly  
100 brother who tagged along wherever I went. And it was about that time that I began to grow. My chest puffed up with muscle and, strangely, a few more ribs. Even my hands, those fleshy hammers, showed bravely through the cuffs, the fingers already hardening for the coming fights. But that L-shaped rip on the left sleeve got bigger, bits of stuffing coughed out from its wound after a hard day of play. I finally Scotch-taped it closed, but in rain or cold

### ⑩ SIMILES AND METAPHORS

Underline the simile Soto uses in lines 79–84. How does this simile help you understand Soto's frustration?

---

---

---

---

---

---

**propeller** (prə-pĕl'ər) *n.* a spinning blade used to move a boat or airplane forward  
**propel** *v.*

### ⑪ SUMMARIZE

Reread lines 85–94. What does the narrator blame the jacket for? Use your log to summarize the key events that contributed to his feelings about the jacket.

#### Key Events

•	
•	



**shrivel** (shrĭ'vəl) *v.* to shrink or wrinkle

**vicious** (vĭsh'əs) *adj.* severe or fierce

### SUMMARIZE

Reread lines 119–124. Record a key event in the log to tell how long Soto wore the jacket. Then note an important idea about how Soto feels the jacket shaped his life during that time.

Key Events	
•	
•	

### PAUSE & REFLECT

Underline the metaphor Soto uses in lines 132–134. What final thought does the metaphor help Soto convey?

---



---



---



---



---

weather the tape peeled off like a scab and more stuffing fell out until that sleeve shriveled into a palsied arm.<sup>5</sup> That winter the elbows began to crack and whole chunks of green began to fall off. I showed the cracks to my mother, who always seemed to be at the stove with steamed-up glasses; and she said that there were children in Mexico who would love that jacket. I told her that this was America and yelled that Debbie, my sister, didn't have a jacket like mine. I ran outside, ready to cry, and climbed the tree by the alley to think bad thoughts and watch my breath puff white and disappear.

But whole pieces still casually flew off my jacket when I played hard, read quietly, or took vicious spelling tests at school. When it became so spotted that my brother began to call me "camouflage," I flung it over the fence into the alley. Later, however, I swiped the jacket off the ground and went inside to drape it across my lap and mope. ⑥

I was called to dinner: steam silvered my mother's glasses as she said grace;<sup>6</sup> my brother and sister with their heads bowed made ugly faces at their glasses of powdered milk. I gagged too, but eagerly ate big rips of buttered tortilla that held scooped-up beans. Finished, I went outside with my jacket across my arm. It was a cold sky. The faces of clouds were piled up, hurting. I climbed the fence, jumping down with a grunt. I started up the alley and soon slipped into my jacket, that green ugly brother who breathed over my shoulder that day and ever since. ⑦

### PAUSE & REFLECT

5. **palsied** (pôl'zēd) **arm:** a paralyzed or weakened arm.

6. **grace:** a short prayer or blessing said before or after a meal.

## Literary Analysis: Similes and Metaphors

Recall that metaphors and similes are literary devices that use comparisons to help readers see things in a new way. A simile uses the words *like* or *as*. Use the chart below to gather similes and metaphors that Soto uses in "The Jacket."



**READING 7** Identify the literary language and devices used in personal narratives.

Simile/Metaphor	Basic Description	Positive or Negative
"I stared at the jacket, like an enemy."	He stared meanly or cautiously at it.	negative

Review the similes and metaphors that Soto uses in "The Jacket." What overall tone, or attitude toward the jacket, do these comparisons convey? What else do they contribute to the essay?

---



---



---



---



---





**READING 10A** Summarize the main ideas and supporting details in text, demonstrating an understanding that a summary does not include opinions.  
**RC-6(F)** Summarize texts in ways that maintain meaning and logical order within a text.

## Reading Strategy: Summarize

Use your notes about key events in "The Jacket" to write a summary of the selection. Remember that a summary is a brief retelling of a text's main ideas and that it should not include **opinions**, or personal views. Make sure you maintain the same order and meaning as the original text.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What builds CONFIDENCE?

Reread lines 56–65, and review your notes from page 192. Do you think that the jacket was entirely responsible for damaging Soto's self-confidence? Explain.

---

---

---

## Vocabulary Practice

Complete each sentence with the vocabulary word that best completes it.

profile

propeller

shrivel

vicious

1. The airplane made an emergency landing when its \_\_\_\_\_ broke.
2. It was sad to see my favorite sweater \_\_\_\_\_ and shrink with each wash.
3. I know he was upset, but he didn't need to be so \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Many portraits show only the person's \_\_\_\_\_, not the whole face.

## Academic Vocabulary in Writing

aspect      distinctive      interpret      perceive      sensory

Review "The Jacket" to find **distinctive** phrases such as "day-old guacamole" and "green ugly brother," and vivid verbs such as "paraded" and "silvered." How does Soto's use of memorable words and phrases affect the way you **perceive** the jacket? Include at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your response. Definitions of these words are on page 167.

---

---

---

---



**READING 7** Identify the literary language and devices used in personal narratives. **10A** Summarize the main ideas and supporting details in text, demonstrating an understanding that a summary does not include opinions.

### Texas Assessment Practice

**DIRECTIONS** Use "The Jacket" to answer questions 1–4.

- 1 Why is Soto disappointed by his sixth-grade year?
  - ☐ A His mother doesn't understand him.
  - ☐ B He doesn't do well in school.
  - ☐ C He has to wear an ugly jacket.
  - ☐ D Girls don't pay attention to him.
- 2 From his writing, you can tell that Soto feels that —
  - ☐ F the jacket made him a failure
  - ☐ G the jacket will look better when he gets older
  - ☐ H no one understands him, no matter how hard he tries
  - ☐ J other people's clothes are just as ugly as his
- 3 Which of the following is an example of a metaphor?
  - ☐ A *my chest puffed up with muscle*
  - ☐ B *flapped the jacket like a bird's wings*
  - ☐ C *that sleeve shriveled into a palsied arm*
  - ☐ D *I watched the white puffs of my breath thin to nothing*
- 4 What does Soto mean when he calls his jacket "that green ugly brother who breathed over my shoulder"?
  - ☐ F He knows he will defeat it some day.
  - ☐ G The jacket smells bad.
  - ☐ H He thinks his siblings get better clothes.
  - ☐ J He dislikes it intensely but he can't get away from it.